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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000872

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER
FROM BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CF](#)
SUBJECT: CONGO/B: THE TROUBLED POOL REGION - EVERYONE'S TO
BLAME

REF: A) KINSHASA 0575 B) KINSHASA 0436

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBIN R. SANDERS, REASONS 1.4 B AND D

1.(C) Summary: Since the UN convey to the Pool Region was stopped and harassed by armed bandits in late April, there has been a flurry of activity (not all good) on addressing the security, elections, and development needs of the Region.

Everyone is playing their political game - the Congo/B Government as well as former Ninja rebel leader Pastor Ntumi - at the cost of the residents and the much-needed post-conflict rehabilitation of the Region. Very few NGOs work in the Pool because of the insecurities and lack of infrastructure. The Congolese Government (ROC), and Pastor Ntumi have more "smoke and mirrors" surrounding their actions on security and advancing development that it is clear that neither side is concerned with what is in the best interest of the Region's residents. Security in some areas is precarious as groups of 8-10 armed bandits (formerly Ninjas members) harass and intimidate the local population. This does not bode well for the ROC's February 2005 announcement that elections would be held in the Pool this year (ref B). End Summary.

A Closer Look at the Pool Region:

12. (C) Based on Ambassador's April 23 visit to the Pool Region (at the same time as the UN convoy was attacked) and subsequent discussions May 10-20 with journalists, former Ninjas, UN contacts, NGOs, clergy, ROC and Pool Region leaders, it is unclear how many armed men remain under former rebel leader Pastor Ntumi's control. What is evident, however, is that many of the young men who were part of Ntumi's Ninja forces prior to the March 2003 peace accords have struck out on their own in small groups of 8-10 armed men, intimidating and harassing the local population. Hence, the security environment, outside of the major cities like Kinkala, Mindouli, and Mandamba is not under anyone's control -- including the ROC Government. This makes the task of advancing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) activities more of a challenge.

13. (C) The devastation and destruction of the Pool is alarming. During Ambassador's April 23 visit it was evident that no rehabilitation had taken place in the Region. Schools, farms, homes, roads, and communities remained destroyed. Outside of the government, the church and a few NGOs, there is no formal employment. The main route from Brazzaville to the Pool district capital of Kinkala-Mindouli, the distance of about of 80 kilometers, takes 5-6 hours to travel as a result of the deterioration of the road. Many schools have no roofs, textbooks, sanitation, water or electricity. Homes and farms are in the same deplorable conditions, with many abandoned. The few NGOs (none American) that work in the area focus mostly on health and food issues given the infrastructure challenges. The only bright spot is that many residents viewed the April 23 opening of the UNDP office in Kinkala, despite the UN convoy being stopped by armed bands en route, as a hopeful sign. However, since the UN convoy incident, the UN has been cautious about road travel to Kinkala and Mindouli, although it now has two international staff members based there full time.

The DDR Program - Remains on Hold:

14. (C) As a result of the UN convoy incident, the EU/UNDP DDR program announced in March 2005 has not advanced. In discussion on May 19-20 with both the EU and UNDP, they noted that they want the ROC to better underscore its commitment to addressing Pool Region development and more assurances about safety and security on the Brazzaville-Kinkala-Mindouli road. Moreover, there are public diplomacy challenges to DDR implementation as former Ninjas are reluctant to give up arms without payment, and are not yet confident that arms will truly be destroy.

15. (C) The recent twist to the DDR debate, however, is that

former rebel leader Pastor Ntumi announced on RFI on May 18 that he would "execute his own DDR program, and collect arms from his men." Former Ninjas expressed concern over the announcement to the Embassy on May 25 as they now believe Ntumi and his family have been co-opted by the government. There are reports that Ntumi is receiving government stipends and vehicles. Thus, none of the former Ninjas, reportedly, will give their arms to him because they claim he in turn would just sell them for personal gain.

16. (C) Meanwhile, despite the ROC's fanfare to provide DDR assistance to 450 ex-soldiers in the Pool under a government funded program, it has pulled back since the incident with the UN convoy (ref A). It is claiming that the "atmosphere in the Pool is no longer conducive for their program." The government has also encouraged other groups such as the ILO (which is implementing a small ex-child soldier's program with Department of Labor funds) not to work in the Pool. (Note: The Embassy has encouraged the ILO consultant to review options in this area given that parts of their program can be implemented in cities such as Kinkala and Mindouli working with local NGO partners in the Region. End Note).

17. (C) Comment: Whether any of the analysis by the range of Embassy contacts -- journalists, former Ninjas, UN, NGOs, government and other political leaders -- is true, it demonstrates, however, that there is a lot of interest in the Pool Region, but all for the wrong reasons. Without a real post-conflict development focus on rehabilitating the Pool, it is unlikely that the country overall can move from its fragile post-conflict status to lasting nation-wide security and development. In addition, the Pool Region was the agricultural breadbasket of the country prior to the years of civil war, and if farmers are afraid to return to the fields, lack of food self-sufficiency for the entire country, along with the high cost of living, will continue. As for elections in the Pool, despite the ROC leadership's stated commitment for elections this year, this too looks unlikely.

18. (U) Brazzaville Embassy Office - Sanders
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